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Adding processes of direct democracy to an assessment of political participation

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Tiago Peterlevitz is a MA candidate at the University of São Paulo, Political Science Department. Currently he is about to finish his thesis "Conceptualizing and measuring democracy in Colombia and Venezuela", where he criticizes some available indices of democracy and offers suggestions concerning the development of this kind of constructs. His research interests include democracy and democratization processes, participatory politics, mechanisms of direct democracy and Latin American politics.

ABSTRACT

Since Robert Dahl coined the concept polyarchy, several attempts were made to develop indices that aim to measure citizens' political participation in a given polity. The present paper evaluates these efforts and shows that most of them equal the mentioned dimension to the extension of suffrage. This considerably "thin" notion of participation has been criticized and was later enriched by other elements, most notably measures of voter turnout. With the growing number of works that catalogue and examine different processes of direct democracy, it is possible to further improve these indicators. This paper is an initial attempt to build an index that takes into consideration voter turnout and processes of direct democracy in an assessment of political participation.

KEY WORDS

Political participation, participation measurement, processes of direct democracy, voter turnout.

INDEX

1. Introduction[1]

Social scientists concerned with the task of measuring abstract concepts face several difficulties. As empirical or scientific enterprises[2], their theories must be based on definitions that are not only open to questioning, but to transformation. In the exact sciences, a theory is a collection of theorems that asserts something about the tangible world and that can be tested empirically within given limits of accuracy. A theorem, on its turn, is an assemblage of propositions that are logically derived from other propositions and definitions. The validity of these theorems is assured by other theorems, which are themselves a consequence of other theorems… These propositions are reducible until they reach a basic proposition for which one does not need evidence, as its meaning is assumed and the terms that describe it are plain[3]. The mentioned empirical test is made through the analysis of certain variables, rigorously defined and accurately quantified. Thus, in the mechanics of motion, all theories are related to three kinds of quantities (length, time and mass) that present no disputes regarding their definitions and measurement methods. In chemistry, substances are known by their properties, whose definitions comprehend measurements in the classical terms of physics. Therefore an unequivocal collection of measurable variables is available to scientists dealing with exact disciplines, enabling them to develop propositions related to how the observed elements interact and depict "reality" (RAPOPORT, 1958, p. 973-978).

When social scientists emulate this approach while constructing theories, an important issue pervades their explanations: "to assume that entities called politics, society, power, […] etc., actually exist, just as cats, icebergs, […] and grains of wheat exist, and that each has an essence discoverable by proper application of reason and observation" (RAPOPORT, 1958, p. 979-980). In the social sciences, the problem, more precisely, does not reside in the existence of these entities, but in the

[1] This is a work in progress and is receiving financial support from the *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo* (Fapesp). A previous version of it was presented at the 1st IPSA-ECPR Joint Conference, held on February 16-19th, 2011 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The author wishes to thank the comments received on that occasion, especially those from the chairs of the panel on direct democracy, Rolf Rauschembach and Uwe Serdült. Additional comments are welcome and can be sent to tiago.peterlevitz@usp.br.

[2] "I shall certainly admit a [theoretical] system as empirical or scientific only if it is capable of being tested by experience" (POPPER, 2002, p. 18).

[3] Accordingly, for Wittgenstein (1981), "propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions" and "an elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself" (prop. 5, p. 103).

consensus behind the definition of a concept in a specific manner and, furthermore, in the ways in which it can be measured.

Notwithstanding these adversities, and unlike cats, icebergs and grains of wheat, the meanings of many social science concepts are also subject to change. This poses an additional challenge, as "men are not permanently imprisoned in the framework of (often inherited) concepts they use; they can not only break out of this framework but can create a new one, better suited to the needs of the occasion" (MERTON, 1968, p. 146).

Certainly that is the case of the concept "political participation". For this specific form of participation, we mean, following Verba, Nie and Kim (1978), "those legal activities [undertaken] by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (p. 46).

Several attempts were made to develop indices that try to measure diverse understandings of the referred concept. These efforts tried to tackle the difficulties mentioned above in two ways[4]. One group of works sought to produce data specifically for this enterprise, developing surveys which would capture the behavior of their respondents through interviews and questionnaires[5]. The assessment of participation[6] carried out in these researches focuses on citizens' attitudes such as signing petitions, taking part in public demonstrations, etc. As conventional electoral participation generally is not comprised, they could be subsumed by the label *non-electoral* studies. Given the amount of resources needed, few analyses that have adopted this perspective covered more than a handful of countries[7]. The most known works that have pursued it and still examined a considerably large cross-

[4] There is a vast research field, which does not face the measurement issues stated above, dedicated to explain why some people cast votes, while others do not. Albeit concerned with political participation, it aims essentially at elucidating differences in voter turnout rates. Achievements of this literature are examined in Blais (2006) and Geys (2006). On its turn, this paper is interested in the concept political participation itself and, as we shall see, in its relations with democratic theory.

[5] For a review of early works of this kind, see Conway (1991).

[6] In accordance to the employed definition, all references made to the term "participation" in this paper are extraneous to instances unrelated to *political* participation.

[7] The goal of some of these studies, as made explicit by one of them, was "not determining whether there is more [participatory] activity in one nation than in another". They were "interested in comparing across nations in terms of the internal distribution of activity within each and in terms of the forces that shape that internal distribution" (VERBA et al., 1978, p. 50).

national sample of cases are the ones made by Inglehart and associates through the World Values Surveys (INGLEHART, 1977, 1990, 1997; INGLEHART & WELZEL, 2005) and the ones conducted by the regional Barometers (Latin, European, Arab, etc).

Another group of works has tried to evaluate political participation based on *electoral* data easily found for a large number of countries. Not only the availability[8] of this kind of information but also its presumed objectivity and the relevance of these institutions for most political systems have made this approach preferred by mainstream democratic theorists, who, after Dahl (1956, 1971), have paid increasing attention to the concept in question. Studies that embrace this perspective could be entitled *electoralists* and usually employ a narrower conception of participation, restricting it to the act of voting. The present paper wishes to contribute to this line of inquiry, which will be examined in more depth below, arguing that data on processes of direct democracy can be used to enrich current efforts to measure political participation. In our concluding comments we will return and address some issues concerning the unused approach.

2. Democratic theory, political participation and processes of direct democracy

For many years the study of participation was not taken into consideration by democratic theory. The Schumpeterian view of democracy, which became dominant in social sciences after the end of the Second World War (HELD, 2006, p. 141; RICCI, 1970, p. 241-242), placed just one dimension – competition – as its defining characteristic. As late as 1967, some researchers were skeptical about the possibilities of measurement of a concept such as polyarchy, coined by Dahl (1956) more than a decade before.

> Of course political scientists' interest in democracy includes more than the existence and maintenance of democratic institutions. Two lines of further refinements have relied upon system-level democratic "behaviors" to make additional distinctions among political systems with democratic institutions. One of these developments deals with Dahl's concept of polyarchy, the other with political equality. While extremely meaningful, these concepts require much ingenuity to operationalize, especially on a cross-national level (MCCRONE & CNUDDE, 1967, p. 73).

[8] After all, "theoretic interest tends to shift to those areas in which there is an abundance of pertinent statistical data" (MERTON, 1968, p. 168).

The modernization theories being developed at that time[9], in their attempts to measure democracy, slowly embraced a Dahlian perspective and so considered assessments of both contestation and participation in their investigations. Perhaps Neubaer (1967) was the first scholar who tried to evaluate empirically a conception of political participation within this branch of literature, task that was undertaken later by others (BANKS, 1970; JACKMAN, 1973; WINHAM, 1970).

Neubauer's and many other studies (ARAT, 1991; FREEDOM HOUSE, 2006; HADENIUS, 1992; JACKMAN, 1973) used the extension of suffrage as the only proxy for gauging participation[10]. While this option was clearly an advance considering previous works, it was also subject to criticism. What was being measured, one could have argued, was just the *potential* participation of citizens in politics, which would not correspond to the *effective* situation this concept was supposed to portray. Several kinds of restrictions, both formal and informal, can be inflicted on populations already enfranchised and would impair assessments that do not account for information revealing the current state of affairs on the topic.

The solution to this issue was to bring in voter turnout data, task that was performed by the indicator of Vanhanen (2000, 2002). But this decision also poses some difficulties. Two methods are usually found in studies dealing with this kind of information. The percentage of voters that indeed participate in elections can refer to the amount of people who, according to their age, were supposedly allowed to vote. Such data depends on censuses that might be conducted at considerable intervals not coincident with elections, giving rise to accuracy problems. This option would also underestimate turnout rates due to difficulties in distinguishing enfranchised from non-enfranchised citizens (like foreigners, some criminal convicts, etc.). As an alternative, it is also possible to relate voter turnout measures to the number of citizens who are formally registered to participate in a specific election. But choosing this second approach would also bias the results, because in some

[9] For more information about this literature, see Diamond (1992) and Przeworski and Limongi (1997).

[10] Many of the mentioned works also scrutinize whether citizens are able to (i.e., have the possibility of) participate in politics through demonstrations, freely express their ideas, etc. Although these activities are related to non-electoral forms of political participation, they can be examined as part of concerns dealing with individual rights (both civil and political) and, for that, as belonging to issues related to other democratic dimensions such as those referring to competition and rule of law. As all these dimensions tend to overlap considerably, an important task of researchers whose aim is measurement is to clearly delimitate them, in order to avoid problems of redundancy. On the subject, see Goertz (2006, p. 106-109) and Munck and Verkuilen (2009, p. 21-23). Our decision to employ a considerably narrow conception of participation was taken bearing in mind these issues.

countries there are many unregistered segments of the population[11]. There is no easy escape from these problems, especially while handling several cases. Theoretically, if participation is considered a proxy for popular sovereignty – a crucial idea to democratic theory –, census related data, as it covers all adult population, would be more adequate than information related to registered voters (BOLLEN, 1980, p. 373). In this paper we will use the former, as most specialized voter turnout studies do (GEYS, 2006, p. 639), acknowledging the referred issues.

Problems regarding the comparison of countries in which voting is compulsory with others in which it is optional are also important. The literature shows that mandatory voting laws increase turnout rates by around 10 to 15 points, depending on their enforcement (BLAIS, 2006, p. 112-113). For democratic theory, the question of whether or not these laws add to the "democraticness" of a country is highly controversial. Some argue that the bigger the number of voters, the more representative and democratic is an election (LACROIX, 2007; LIJPHART, 1997). Others say that obliging citizens to vote is not democratic at all (JAKEE & SUN, 2006; LEVER, 2010). As the theme being analyzed here is participation and not properly democracy, both types of countries can be compared leaving aside these normative questions[12].

Besides the extension of suffrage and voter turnout measures, an electoralist view of participation can be further enriched with the assessment of processes of direct democracy (PDD). The worldwide usage of these mechanisms is increasing: their frequency today almost doubled when compared to 50 years ago (ALTMAN, 2011, p. 65)[13]. Hence evaluations of citizen's participation in politics should try to reflect their growing involvement with these democratic instruments. Specially because contrary to other non-electoral participatory institutions, such as those experiences dealing with city master plans, health councils, participatory budgeting, etc, which for their diversity are yet to be catalogued and examined in a comprehensive comparative manner[14], PDD have been studied systematically and some databases are available to researchers working with large cross-national data.

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[11] Some analyses of the United States (POWELL, 1986; ROSENSTONE & WOLFINGER, 1978) show that registration requirements considerably reduce voter turnout.

[12] In other words, it is not a problem to our investigation if compulsory voting laws contribute to (or, to some, distort) voter turnout results. As Bollen (1990) puts it, discussing alternative democracy indices, "voter turnout may be a better measure of political participation, a concept that should be studied in its own right" (p. 14).

[13] Altman's definition of PDD is a little bit different from ours, which will be presented below.

[14] Although there are several works comparing different practices of such institutions, e.g., Avritzer (2009), Isunza Vera and Gurza Lavalle (2010) and Sintomer,

The addition of PDD to the assessment of political participation has been done just by Vanhanen (2002). His Index of Democratization (ID) covers the period from 1810 to 2000 and espouses a Dahlian conception of democracy, gauging competition and participation. For the last two years of his database (1999 and 2000), he started to consider an evaluation of what he calls "referendums". Prior to 1999, participation was simply measured as being equal to voter turnout rates[15] calculated for parliamentary or presidential elections, depending on how power was divided. If a country presented concurrent powers (like the semi-presidential French Fifth Republic[16]), equal weight (50%) was given to both elections. The participation score could range from 0 to 70, the latter being the limit given even to cases that surpassed it. For 1999 and 2000, the same scoring procedure was followed, but the occurrence of a state or national referendum would add 1 or 5 points, respectively, to the year they took place. The impact of referendums was limited to 30 points for a specific year and the combined percentage of both voter turnout and referendums also could not exceed 70 points (VANHANEN, 2002, p. 1-2).

Vanhanen's measurement of participation can be criticized on several grounds. These issues will be addressed below, together with the decisions pertaining to the construction of our own index.

3. Adding processes of direct democracy to an assessment of political participation

Limiting the points attributed to voter turnout measures, Vanhanen improperly hinders the comparison of countries that present high values on this matter. In his evaluation, for instance, a country that had a turnout rate of 70% would be given the same score as another that had 90%. The present work did not place any restrictions on this matter. Also, while Vanhanen used several different sources for voter turnout, what raises some comparability issues, we relied only on the International IDEA Voter Turnout database[17], which presents data for elections that were

Herzberg and Röcke (2008), there is not any study or database presenting worldwide information about them. Existing studies are based on the experience of just a small number of cases or on a specific regional context.

15 As relative to census data.

16 Or, quite oddly, Brazil after 1985.

17 See López Pintor and Gratschew (2002) for more details about the database. As it did not provide information about Colombia, only for this country we used data from another source (BUSHNELL, 2007, p. 450-451).

considered competitive[18]. Hence our sample is constrained to countries regarded as somewhat democratic by this organization, what is not a problem as their criterion for that is considerably generous. Furthermore, several researchers (BOLLEN, 1980, p. 373; HADENIUS, 1992, p. 41; MUNCK & VERKUILEN, 2009, p. 25) contest the use of turnout figures when dealing with authoritarian regimes.

Our study as well as Vanhanen's disregards the extension of suffrage. As argued above, voter turnout rates account for citizen's effective participation in politics, while the share of population that is able to vote reflects the potential side of it. But as the employed turnout measures are related to census data, they already take into consideration the number of adults that supposedly should be enfranchised. If voting is not allowed to some segments of the population, this would result in lower turnout rates.

Additionally, what was meant by referendums was not explained by Vanhanen, thus his study does not differentiate between the several possible types of PDD. As the terminology of PDD varies considerably, not only between countries in which they are used, but also across the literature dedicated to the subject, it is important to clearly define what do we mean by the term and, therefore, what will be examined in this assessment. By processes of direct democracy we refer, following Kaufmann, Büchi and Braun (2010, p. 196), to electoral instruments through which citizens can vote and directly decide on substantive issues. Thus our conception of PDD includes mechanisms such as bottom-up procedures, which are triggered by citizens themselves, and also top-down procedures, which originate from the political establishment (i.e., by the executive or legislative branches or by mandatory legislation) (ALTMAN, 2011, p. 8)[19]. This understanding of PDD does not account for recall elections, as these instances are related to governments – not to substantive issues – and for that they can be considered as dealing with representative democracy (and not with direct democracy) (KAUFMANN et al, 2010, p. 196; RAUSCHENBACH, 2010, p. 5). This study also does not comprehend nonbinding PDD as well as legislative popular initiatives, as with their usage voters actually do not *decide* on the issues at stake, leaving matters to be settled by official authorities[20].

[18] For the organization, "there was a degree of competitiveness" when "more than one party contested the elections, or one party and independents contested the elections, or the election was only contested by independent candidates" (LÓPEZ PINTOR & GRATSCHEW, 2002, p. 10).

[19] Usually the mechanisms fitting the first group are called referendums, while the ones belonging to the second are entitled plebiscites. But we prefer using the terms "bottom-up" and "top-down" to identify them, as Altman does, in order to avoid nomenclature problems with the diverse terms employed in the literature.

[20] This is the reason why the referred procedures can be qualified as "populist placebos" (ALTMAN, 2011, p. 7).

Albeit PDD seem to be more developed at the local rather than at the national level (KAUFMANN et al, 2010, p. 110; MITTENDORF, 2007, p. 214), this work will only focus on the latter, meaning that just nationwide procedures will be evaluated.

Vanhanen's source for PDD was mainly Keesing's Record of World Events, which is not dedicated to collect this specific kind of information, unlike current databases[21] such as the one used here, produced by the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (C2D)[22]. Another issue is that, as stated above, PDD were only considered for the last two years of Vanhanen's work, hence participation scores during this period tend to be higher. Also, no justification was given to the points attributed to these mechanisms. The present work, after qualifying all PDD recorded by the referred database as being bottom-up or top-down procedures, found that the latter were twice more common than the former during the period covered by our analysis. Based on this frequency, bottom-up PDD were given twice the weight of top-down PDD, as the former can be considered more participatory as they are initiated by citizens themselves.

Direct and indirect democracy should be seen as complementary[23]. Since thinkers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu asserted the incompatibility between sovereignty and representation, many democratic theorists have chosen one over the other. But the instances in which PDD are used worldwide are mainly (and increasingly) concentrated in representative democracies (ALTMAN, 2011, p. 69-70). The "opposite of representation is not participation: the opposite of representation is exclusion. And the opposite of participation is abstention" (PLOTKE, 1997, p. 24)[24]. Hence, an assessment of political participation should reflect this association. For

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21 The databases available to researchers are discussed in Mittendorf (2007).

22 C2D considers a unique direct democracy process every decision made on substantive issues by popular vote. This means that if one referendum addresses three different questions, such mechanism is registered as three different PDD.

23 "The distinction between direct and indirect politics opens up promising paths of interpretation rather than creating obstacles, since it frames the institutional and sociocultural spaces within which the various components of political action take shape – from opinion and will formation to voluntary participation in movements, contestation, voting, and decision-making. […] Participation and representation [are not] alternative forms of democracy but […] related forms constituting the continuum of political judgment and action in modern democracies" (URBINATI, 2006, p 3).

24 This complementarity is voiced by many others in the literature about direct democracy (ALTMAN, 2011, p. 2; BUTLER & RANNEY, 1994, p. 21; INTERNATIONAL IDEA, 2008, p. 19; MENDELSOHN & PARKIN, 2001, p.4; RAUSCHENBACH, 2010, p. 5). For arguments against and counter-arguments in favor of the use of PDD within representative democracies, see Budge (2001), Butler and Ranney (1994), Setälä (1999, chap. 4) and Walker (2003, chap. 6).

that this work, while evaluating the referred concept yearly for the countries covered by our sample, added a score for each PDD held in a given year. Although this logical operation is supported theoretically, its weighting is not. Because of this issue it was necessary to arbitrarily stipulate a value (more on this below) which would bestow PDD a certain importance in relation to the other variable (voter turnout). Thus we chose that every bottom-up PDD could add 25% to a country's annual participation score. Top-down PDD could account for an addition of 12.5%. These increases were blocked if the participation score reached 1 (that is, 100%) and were weighted according to voter turnout measures displayed by a country in its previous national elections[25]. This means that four occurrences of bottom-up PDD or eight of top-down PDD could grant the same score as the event of one "regular" election. The relationship among these elements could be considered as one of substitutability, in which "the absence of one dimension can be compensated by the presence of other dimensions" (GOERTZ, 2006, p. 45). When evaluating participation, citizen's low turnout rates in one election can be compensated by more occasions on which people are able to express themselves politically[26]. Thus they should be aggregated by addition. The overall rationale of our measurement procedure is shown below.

$$PPS = VT + (b\text{-}uPDD * VT * 0.25) + (t\text{-}dPDD * VT * 0.125)$$

For a given year, a country's political participation score (PPS) is equal to the addition of three elements: its voter turnout rate (VT); the product of the number of instances in which bottom-up PDD (b-uPDD) occurred, the voter turnout rate and 0.25; and the product of the number of instances in which top-down PDD (t-dPDD) occurred, its voter turnout rate and 0.125.

Following Vanhanen (2000, 2002), voter turnout rates related to legislative or presidential elections were considered, respectively, for parliamentary or presidential countries. Equal weight (50%) was given to both elections in the cases of semi-presidential countries[27]. These regimes were identified according to the

[25] This procedure was employed as there are several missing information for turnout data concerning PDD and also because C2D recorded them as a percentage of the registered electors (and this work uses turnout information related to census data). In our dataset, the average of voter turnout rates for "regular" elections was around 70% and for PDD was around 50%. This implies that the scores given to PDD are a little bit overestimated.

[26] This compensation would not make sense if the concept being measured was democracy and not participation. The occurrence of several PDD in a dictatorship would not counteract the absence of elections

[27] For semi-presidential cases, when data for only one type of elections (presidential or parliamentary) were available, only they were taken into consideration.

dataset developed by Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2009)[28]. Voter turnout scores were assigned only to years in which elections were held and were extended until another took place. This is reasonable as "the way in which a government originates continues to be a characteristic that affects its nature beyond the moment of its installation" (MUNCK, 2009, p. 152).

Our sample comprises 107 countries, 824 "regular" elections, 555 top-down PDD and 275 bottom-up PDD between the years of 1950 and 2000. Table 1 presents the yearly average of the political participation score for selected periods for the tenth best ranked countries. The full evaluation is displayed in the appendix.

Table 1. Political participation yearly average scores for selected countries (1950-2000)

Position	Country	1950-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	1950-2000
1	Italy	0.93	0.94	0.95	0.96	0.96	0.95
2	Switzerland	0.96	0.85	0.97	0.86	0.93	0.91
3	New Zealand	0.94	0.90	0.88	0.91	0.85	0.90
4	Belgium	0.88	0.87	0.88	0.90	0.84	0.87
5	Iceland	0.86	0.87	0.90	0.88	0.84	0.87
6	Austria	0.89	0.91	0.89	0.86	0.77	0.86
7	Denmark	0.81	0.90	0.90	0.85	0.86	0.86
8	Australia	0.84	0.86	0.89	0.87	0.84	0.86
9	Netherlands	0.87	0.90	0.87	0.82	0.75	0.84
10	Sweden	0.78	0.83	0.87	0.86	0.81	0.83

As expected, countries in which voting was compulsory and that hosted a considerable amount of PDD, like Italy, figure in the top of the table. Switzerland, where voting is not mandatory, had its low turnout rates compensated by the many PDD that took place there. This case can be considered an outlier, as its citizens face a yearly average of 9.12 instances of PDD, accounting for 50% of the world's usage of bottom-up PDD (ALTMAN, 2011, p. 73). Other countries like Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Ireland, Uruguay and Denmark also had their scores considerably enhanced

[28] Except for the more recent periods of Mozambique (1994-2000), Russia (1993-2000) and South Africa (1994-2000), which were identified by these authors as civilian dictatorships. We disagree on this classification and prefer to follow Siaroff (2003), who generally qualified these countries as semi-presidential.

by the occurrence of PDD. The table 2 presented next shows how these mechanisms increased the PPS of some countries.

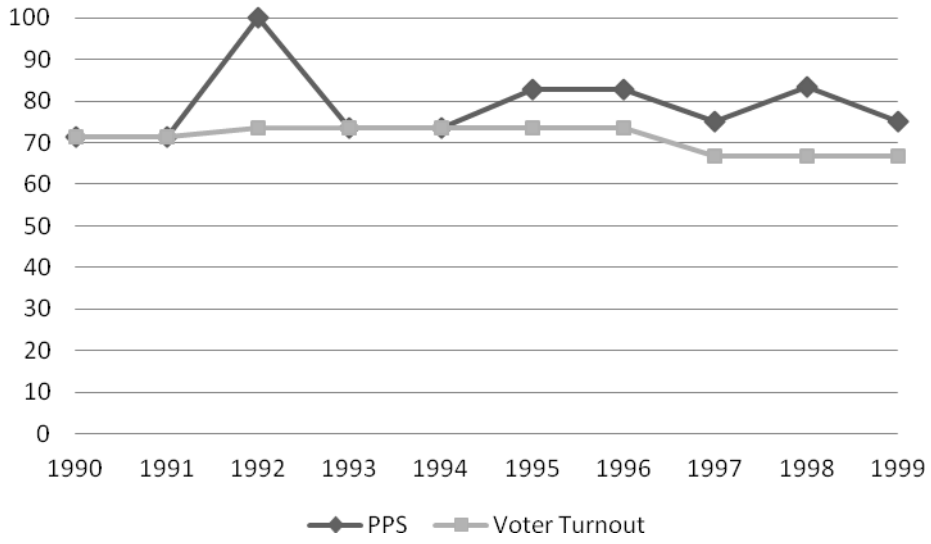
Table 2. Yearly average points added to the PPS by PDD for selected countries (1950-2000)

Position	Country	1950-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	1950-2000
1	Switzerland	0.34	0.30	0.54	0.46	0.56	0.44
2	Liechtenstein	0.04	0.08	0.13	0.16	0.11	0.10
3	New Zealand	0.03	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06
4	Ireland	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.08	0.04
5	Uruguay	0.05	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03
6	Denmark	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.03
7	Australia	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.02	0.02
8	Lithuania	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.02
9	Italy	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.06	0.02
10	Slovakia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.02
11	France	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
12	Ecuador	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.01

The introduction of PDD to the assessment of political participation adds information to the evaluation of the concept, producing finer distinctions between the studied units. If the case of Ireland is taken, for instance, in years in which this country did not hold PDD, the measurement of its electoral participation would equal its voter turnout rate. As is seen in figure 1 below, which depicts the PPS and voter turnout rates for Ireland in the decade of 1990, this happened in 1990, 1991, 1993 and 1994.

In 1992 Ireland hosted 4 top-down PDD and as our scoring procedure limits the PPS to 1 (or 100%), this was the amount attributed to the year in question. From 1995 to 1999 the country had more top-down PDD: two in 1998 and one in each of the remaining years, with scores distributed accordingly. If PDD were not considered in the analysis of participation, Ireland would present similar scores throughout the decade. This would not reflect what actually happened there: having quite stable voter turnout rates for the period, a score attributed to the participation of Irish citizens should be higher for the years they did express more their preferences.

Figure 1. PPS and voter turnout rates in Ireland (1990-1999)



4. Provisional concluding remarks

In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu asseverated that "a fundamental law in democracies [is] that the people should have the *sole* power to enact laws" (MONTESQUIEU, 1977, bk. II, chap. 2, p. 112, emphasis added). The French baron argued that a state in which citizens delegated their sovereignty rights (i.e., their entitlement to elaborate laws themselves) should be classified as presenting a mixed system of government. In this view, systems in which people are not sovereign should not be called democracies[29]. Rousseau, mainly in *On the social contract*[30], was also radically against the representative system, as "sovereignty, being nothing less than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated; and that the sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself: the power indeed may be transmitted, but not the will" (ROUSSEAU, 2003, bk. II, chap. I, p. 15). In the famous metaphor of the Genovese thinker, citizens living under representative governments would be slaves punctuated by moments of freedom, which were restricted only to the periods when elections were held.

[29] "When the body of the people in a republic are possessed of the supreme power, this is called a democracy". (MONTESQUIEU, 1977, bk. II, chap. 2, p. 112).

[30] Rousseau "went from a radical denial of representation in *Du contrat social* to the endorsement of delegation in the *Project de constitution pour la Corse* and the *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*" (URBINATI, 2006, p. 62).

For these authors, democracy was associated with the governmental system found in some ancient city-states, most notably Athens between the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ[31]. The citizens' possibility to propose laws themselves, as well as the selection of officials by lot, was central to these city-states (MANIN, 1997, p. 11). Thus Montesquieu and Rousseau related the referred aspects to democracy, conferring an undemocratic character on representative politics.

On the other hand, contemporary democracies are, as is often said, party democracies: it is difficult to imagine today *any* country being governed directly by its citizens. The understanding of representative democracy as a second best expedient to "pure" democracy is based on a sovereignty conception of the eighteenth century. Politics should not be reduced to contractual relations between agent and client, or elector and elected. Politics deals with judgment and beliefs, and the representative system, more than the Athenian model, allows citizens to transcend their specificities and "defines relationships of control (on the part of the represented) and responsibility (on the part of the representatives) that are eminently political and moral" (URBINATI, 2006, p. 50).

Both perspectives briefly discussed above can be used to support the current state of affairs in several contemporary countries, in which direct and indirect forms of democracy are present. And electoral assessments of participation should aim to evaluate these two sides of politics. But as reviewed in this study, almost all empirical democratic theorists focus only on the representative side of it.

This work is an initial effort to fill this gap. We argued that political participation should be measured taking into consideration indicators related to voter turnout and PDD. The extension of suffrage should not be included in such an assessment *if* the employed voting data refer to censuses, as the figures that use the mentioned method already consider the number of citizens who should be able to vote. Voter turnout and PDD information are complementary and they can be logically aggregated by addition. But the main problem with our measurement is that these attributes were arbitrarily weighted. One could reasonably sustain that for contemporary representative democracies, "regular" elections are more important than PDD and that this should be reflected in any weighting scheme. But how relevant the latter would be compared to the former? This is an important issue for multidimensional measurements of concepts. As showed by Munck and Verkuilen (2009, p.30-35), some democracy indices (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2006; VANHANEN, 2002, 2006) have their components aggregated *assuming* (not always consciously) that their components are equally important. Thus it was not necessary to attribute

[31] "Athenian democracy begins with the (more or less mythical) reforms of Solon (*ca*. 580 B.C.) and ends with military defeat and the suppression of democracy in 322" (ELSTER, 1999, p. 259).

weights to their elements, although no justification was given to support such decision. The indicator of Coppedge and Reinicke (1991) tries to avoid this problem using a Guttman scale, but this procedure should not be used if the variables in question are uncorrelated, which is the case for them and for the present work. The Polity IV index (MARSHALL; GURR & JAGGERS, 2010) also arbitrarily weights its components. The occurrence of weighting problems in such widely used democracy rankings exposes the difficulties in tackling these adversities. Future versions of this study should try to handle these issues more appropriately.

As we mentioned in the beginning of this investigation, this work embraces an electoralist view of participation. Therefore only elections were considered in it, whether they were related to direct or indirect forms of democracy. But nothing excludes the possibility of further enriching this approach, combining it with non-electoral perspectives of participation. Some studies (NORRIS, 2002; BLAIS, 2010) indeed take into consideration both views, but in a separate manner (one at a time), without trying to aggregate these two perspectives.

An assessment of participation espousing a comprehensive view of the concept would be less subject to criticisms by each of the perspectives above discussed. As "the evidence accumulated to date about the possibilities and effects of extensive participation is limited" (HELD, 2006, p. 214), these consequences could be better evaluated with the improvement of alternative measurement efforts, such as the present one. But the challenge of developing a more meaningful[32] conception of participation is yet to be achieved. This study has tried only to thicken a considerably narrow comprehension of participation.

[32] "Thickness [...] adds meaning to a concept, but at expense of wide applicability. Thin concepts have more general applicability, but tell us less about the objects they describe" (COPPEDGE, 2007, p. 110).

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6. Appendix

Table 3 . Political participation yearly average scores (1950-2000)

Position	Country	1950-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	1950-2000
1	Italy	0.93	0.94	0.95	0.96	0.96	0.95
2	Switzerland	0.96	0.85	0.97	0.86	0.93	0.91
3	New Zealand	0.94	0.90	0.88	0.91	0.85	0.90
4	Belgium	0.88	0.87	0.88	0.90	0.84	0.87
5	Iceland	0.86	0.87	0.90	0.88	0.84	0.87
6	Austria	0.89	0.91	0.89	0.86	0.77	0.86
7	Denmark	0.81	0.90	0.90	0.85	0.86	0.86
8	Australia	0.84	0.86	0.89	0.87	0.84	0.86
9	Netherlands	0.87	0.90	0.87	0.82	0.75	0.84
10	Sweden	0.78	0.83	0.87	0.86	0.81	0.83
11	Israel	0.77	0.82	0.81	0.81	0.83	0.81
12	Germany	0.82	0.83	0.85	0.79	0.73	0.80
13	Norway	0.79	0.82	0.81	0.83	0.76	0.80
14	Ireland	0.74	0.75	0.84	0.80	0.78	0.78
15	Finland	0.73	0.80	0.75	0.82	0.76	0.77
16	United Kingdom	0.79	0.75	0.75	0.74	0.73	0.75
17	Liechtenstein	0.81	0.74	0.72	0.74	0.67	0.74
18	Greece	0.74	0.51	0.60	0.86	0.85	0.71
19	France	0.72	0.71	0.70	0.71	0.69	0.70
20	Japan	0.73	0.70	0.73	0.71	0.63	0.70
21	Costa Rica	0.44	0.69	0.74	0.80	0.81	0.69
22	Canada	0.70	0.72	0.66	0.67	0.62	0.67
23	Malta	0.00	0.70	0.84	0.90	0.96	0.67
24	Luxembourg	0.60	0.72	0.71	0.67	0.61	0.66
25	United States	0.58	0.62	0.61	0.59	0.57	0.59
26	Uruguay	0.57	0.67	0.10	0.66	0.97	0.59
27	India	0.50	0.59	0.60	0.63	0.61	0.58
28	Venezuela	0.00	0.66	0.80	0.75	0.55	0.54
29	Turkey	0.00	0.73	0.55	0.69	0.80	0.54
30	Trinidad and Tobago	0.00	0.67	0.45	0.72	0.69	0.50
31	Argentina	0.46	0.28	0.22	0.63	0.81	0.48
32	Sri Lanka	0.46	0.62	0.43	0.15	0.65	0.46
33	Dominican Republic	0.00	0.39	0.66	0.62	0.55	0.44

Position	Country	1950-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	1950-2000
34	San Marino	0.00	0.00	0.56	0.81	0.83	0.43
35	Papua New Guinea	0.00	0.00	0.58	0.75	0.83	0.42
36	Portugal	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.82	0.77	0.41
37	Jamaica	0.00	0.59	0.70	0.27	0.49	0.40
38	Mauritius	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.82	0.79	0.40
39	Dominica	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.78	0.82	0.39
40	Ecuador	0.26	0.14	0.13	0.59	0.76	0.37
41	Chile	0.26	0.48	0.11	0.18	0.81	0.37
42	Spain	0.00	0.00	0.32	0.77	0.77	0.37
43	Bahamas	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.64	0.68	0.36
44	Grenada	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.49	0.81	0.35
45	Colombia	0.15	0.41	0.45	0.44	0.34	0.35
46	Panama	0.50	0.36	0.00	0.11	0.69	0.34
47	Saint Lucia	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.67	0.81	0.32
48	Saint Vincent	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.73	0.75	0.31
49	Bolivia	0.29	0.36	0.00	0.36	0.56	0.31
50	Honduras	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.74	0.68	0.28
51	Antigua and Barbuda	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.58	0.79	0.27
52	Brazil	0.28	0.07	0.00	0.16	0.81	0.26
53	Belize	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.67	0.67	0.26
54	Nicaragua	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.77	0.25
55	Kiribati	0.00	0.00	0.32	0.76	0.19	0.25
56	Nauru	0.00	0.00	0.32	0.44	0.48	0.24
57	Solomon	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.54	0.64	0.24
58	Vanuatu	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.53	0.66	0.23
59	Guatemala	0.19	0.18	0.24	0.11	0.31	0.21
60	Thailand	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.41	0.56	0.19
61	Mongolia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.88	0.19
62	Peru	0.12	0.20	0.06	0.53	0.00	0.18
63	Czech Republic	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.81	0.18
64	Bangladesh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.26	0.64	0.18
65	Slovenia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.82	0.16
66	Nepal	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.82	0.16
67	South Korea	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.80	0.16
68	Hungary	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.69	0.15
69	Ghana	0.00	0.08	0.04	0.00	0.64	0.15
70	Cape Verde	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.76	0.15
71	Poland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.60	0.14
72	Bulgaria	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.72	0.14
73	Slovakia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.71	0.14

Position	Country	1950-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	1950-2000
74	Russia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.71	0.14
75	Lithuania	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.68	0.13
76	Latvia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.60	0.13
77	Romania	0.00	0.00	0.00	0,00	0.68	0.13
78	Andorra	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.66	0.13
79	Benin	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.65	0.13
80	Cyprus	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.65	0.13
81	Croatia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.65	0.13
82	El Salvador	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.41	0.13
83	Philippines	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.60	0.12
84	S. Tome and Principe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.60	0.12
85	Estonia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.51	0.12
86	Paraguay	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.46	0.11
87	South Africa	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.56	0.11
88	Ukraine	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.10
89	Fiji	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.48	0.09
90	Mexico	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.46	0.09
91	Mozambique	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.45	0.09
92	Saint Kitts and Nevis	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.08
93	Pakistan	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.30	0.08
94	Central African Rep.	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.08
95	Macedonia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.08
96	Suriname	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.00	0.00	0.08
97	Comoros	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.32	0.08
98	Madagascar	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.38	0.07
99	Malawi	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.34	0.07
100	Armenia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.07
101	Moldova	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30	0.06
102	Nigeria	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.06
103	Niger	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.05
104	Burundi	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.05
105	Mali	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.21	0.04
106	Kenya	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.03
107	Palau	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.02